

CRIMINAL JUSTICE and COLLEGE STUDENTS



CREATING CRIMINAL JUSTICE SURVEYS

On any given day, you likely ask many different questions of those around you. Have you ever realized that you can ask questions in a way that leads individuals to certain answers? For example, imagine asking a friend how much he or she likes your new shirt. Here are three possible ways you could ask the question: (a) Do you like my shirt? (b) How much do you like my shirt? or (c) Don't you like my shirt?

All three questions aim for the same information, but how the questions are asked may influence the

results. When asking questions about criminal justice, crime, and victimization, researchers use caution to make sure that the questions themselves do not lead respondents to specific answers.

With regard to crime, think of three different ways you might ask someone if he or she has ever committed a specific crime. Next, in small groups or as a class, discuss the various ways that you might ask individuals about their criminal behavior. What factors might lead individuals to be dishonest in answering these kinds of questions? Are there things that researchers can do to encourage accurate reporting?